

CHAPTER XI AFTER SIXTY YEARS

MORE than sixty years ago South Australia was a *terra incognita*. Its interior was as little known as the back side of the moon. No white foot had trodden its vast plains nor climbed its lofty hills. It was like a well-appointed domicile, awaiting a suitable tenant. It was made to be inhabited by the highest type of man, and until the purpose of its creation was realised there was something awaiting and amiss. There was no lowing of oxen, nor bleating of sheep; no ploughman's whistle, nor milkmaid's song; no long, freshly-turned furrows, nor fields of waving corn. The air had not vibrated with the sound of horse's hoof nor the rumble of wheels. The music of the whetted scythe no ear had heard. There were no roads, bridges, fences, nor houses surrounded with flowers and fruit-bearing trees. Save the loud laugh of the jackass, the howl of the dingo, or the war-whoop of the blackfellow, few startling noises were heard.

The country abounded in game. Kangaroos and wallabies roamed about in flocks. Here and there families of wombats dwelt in their holes. The emu and her chicks sped over the plain. On the lakes were wild fowl, and the Murray teemed with fish. Where Adelaide now stands serpents glided and kangaroos fed.

The blackfellow held undisputed sway. His was a free-and-easy kind of life. Except the fear of sorcery, and an occasional tribal fight, there was little to trouble his soul. The day was spent in eating and drinking, making weapons or canoes, netting wild fowl, hunting the kangaroo, and spearing fish. At night there was the mystic corrobory. It consisted of a wild, weird song and dance. Sometimes the dance was very lewd. As a rule, the men danced. The women sat on the ground, and kept time by the knocking of waddies together, or striking rolls of skins with the fist.

Infanticide was a common practice. Often a child was killed as soon as it was born.

But there were good as well as evil traits. We have spoken of a few wild white men (whalers and sealers) who had found their way to the South Australian coast before colonisation took place. The Rev. George Taplin, who spent many years among the natives, tells a story that he had heard of those early days. "Some white sealers, on Kangaroo Island, stole from the mainland, near Cape Jervis, three native women, and took them to the island. When the prisoners had stayed with their captors a few weeks, they began to cast about for means to get back to their husbands and friends. At last they found a small dingy belonging to the sealers. It would only hold two. Two of the women had no children, but the third had an infant at the breast; so the two childless lubras took the dingy and started for the mainland, reaching it in safety. The poor mother, left behind with her babe, must have pined sadly for her country and friends; but nothing was heard of her for some time. One day the natives found her body on the beach, just above high-water mark, with her baby tied on her back. She had swum Backstairs Passage (about nine miles in the narrowest part, and infested with sharks), and then, in a state of utter exhaustion, crawled up the shore, and died."

We have seen the first colonist (Samuel Stephens) put his food on Australian shore. We have seen the early emigrants' tents pitched amongst the trees and rushes that skirted the shores of Holdfast Bay. Beds made of rushes; pork barrels and packing cases extemporised as tables; emigrants dragging their goods to the site of a city that was yet to be, have passed before our view. Where those tents, sixty-two years ago, were pitched, the large and aristocratic town of Glenelg now stands, which has some of the finest streets that the Southern Hemisphere can show, and its system

of deep drainage is unsurpassed. Trams are running in all directions. Through country that sixty years ago was unexplored and unknown, trains now rush, laden with passengers, wheat, wool, sheep, cattle, and mineral wealth. There is a beautiful park round the city; outside are crowded suburbs. The population in and around Adelaide alone has been estimated at about one hundred thousand. Dotted over the country are towns, villages, gardens, and farms. It seems like a fairy tale. All has been accomplished in less than threescore years and ten. Sixty-two years ago the population was about five hundred; to-day it is more than three hundred and twenty thousand.

In 1886 we celebrated our Jubilee. Speaking on that occasion, Sir Henry Ayers, one of the early emigrants, said: "Something must be said of the country we have been in the possession of for fifty years. It may not unreasonably be demanded of us to state what use we have made of the talents committed to our care for the benefit of mankind. We have utilised, for pastoral purposes many thousand square miles of country, on which depasture some seven millions of sheep, three million head of cattle, and over one hundred and seventy thousand horses. We have brought under cultivation nearly three millions of acres. We have made it a country productive of wool, of corn, of fruit, of wine, of oil, and a land flowing with milk and honey. We have completed telegraphic communication across the continent, and thus brought Australia within speaking distance of all parts of the world. We have constructed over a thousand miles of railway and many thousands of miles of macadamised road. We have erected various buildings, and built bridges, docks, wharves, jetties, and other works required for our wants. We have made ample provision for educating the people, including the establishment and endowment of a university. We have founded hospitals and asylums for the insane, the sick, the incurable, the blind, the dumb, the deaf, the orphan, and the necessitous poor. ... But some captious critic may say, All these things are for yourselves; tell us what you have done for your brethren abroad? We have fed the people of the outside world with breadstuffs to the value of some thirty-five millions sterling. We have clothed them with some forty millions' worth of wool. ... We have sent them nearly twenty millions sterling of minerals and metals. Could the greatest optimist among the early settlers have predicted such results?"

The natives have not been forgotten. During the last sixty years several mission stations have been established. The most successful has been the mission at Point McLeay. For many years it was under the able superintendence of the Rev. George Taplin, who deserves a niche in South Australian history. Missionary efforts among the Aborigines in this Colony have been very much neutralised by the conduct of lecherous whites.

We saw the early emigrants at Holdfast Bay leaving their bough-booths and canvas tents, and wending their way to the tent of Edward Stephens, in which John White preached the first Methodist sermon on the mainland. Later on (when the site for Adelaide had been fixed) we saw a few Methodists assembled in a hut, on the banks of the Torrens, to consider the advisability of forming a Methodist Society. The number of names was fifteen. They had neither church nor travelling preacher. What do we see to-day, after the lapse of sixty years? In addition to many preaching places, there are –

Churches	271
Ministers	66
Local preachers	422
Sunday-school workers	2,596

Sunday-school scholars	22,886
Church members	8,527
Adherents	49, 204

Our returns would be larger, but several of our members and ministers, of late years, have removed to Western Australia. There are results that we cannot tabulate, such as the number of souls who, during the sixty years of our history, have gone from the Methodist Church militant to join the Church triumphant.

We have only given the statistics for the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Two other vigorous Methodist Societies have been established – the *Primitive Methodist* and the *Bible Christian*.

The first Primitive Methodist service in the new Colony was held in the open air. This was one Sunday afternoon, in June 1840. The place of meeting was Light Square, Adelaide, and the service was conducted by a few laymen. A few years later the pioneer preachers arrived. The Revs. J. Long and J. Wilson came out in 1844, and the Rev. W. Storr in 1846. These have all “entered into rest.” To-day the Primitive Methodist body number –

Churches	118
Ministers	29
Local preachers	220
Sunday-school workers	886
Sunday-school scholars	7,021
Members	3,181
Adherents	14,291

The pioneer preachers of the Bible Christian body arrived in 1850. They were the Revs. James Way and James Rowe. The former has passed away. He was the father of the Right Hon. S. J. Way, Chief Justice and Lieutenant-Governor of South Australia. The venerable James Rowe is still with us. These brethren established the Bible Christian Society. To-day that Society number –

Churches	131
Ministers	38
Local preachers	253
Sunday-school workers	980
Sunday-school scholars	8,176
Members	4,007
Adherents (about)	16,000

This makes a grand total of Methodist progress, *in South Australia alone*, for sixty years as follows: -

Churches	520
Ministers	133
Local preachers	895
Sunday-school workers	4,462
Sunday-school scholars	38,083
Members	15,715
Adherents	79,495

Yet some say that Methodism is dying, or is in a very decrepit state. Surely such critics must move in a very circumscribed sphere, or be subject to some strange hallucination. Still we need to keep our armour bright, tenaciously to grasp the shield of faith, and vigorously to wield the sword of the Spirit. The age in which we live is peculiar. The struggle for existence is keen. The love for amusement has become irrational. The “Higher Criticism” has not been spiritually helpful. It is a difficult

matter to make men see and feel the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Religious indifference is widespread. Men say: "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." "This worldliness" has become predominant. A social gospel is being preached that is merely the skeleton of the Christian religion. The "man of sin" is at work amongst the masses. There is a growing tendency to subvert social order, and to set at nought authority. *If we have our fathers' zeal we have not our fathers' success.* The vitality, permanence, and extension of Methodism depends upon soul-converting energy.

Sixty-three years ago one of the great men of middle Methodism (Peter McOwan) said: "While other Churches regard revivals as gracious singularities in their history, we ought to consider their frequent occurrence as essential to our very existence. Few persons join our communion till they are awakened from the sleep of nature; for our doctrines, as a whole, are such that natural men cannot receive; our discipline is such that they cannot, for any length of time, brook; and as the chief term on which we admit to membership is a 'desire to flee from the wrath to come,' it is not to be expected that they will seek admission till they feel themselves really exposed to wrath. If conversion work, therefore, were to cease among us, the extinction of our societies, or a radical change in the spiritual character of our economy, would be inevitable." These are wise words – true as they are wise; and we ought seriously to ponder them. If the soul-converting power ceases – if *intellectualism* takes the place of *evangelicism* – Methodism must decline, and cease to be.

Let us lay other wise words of the same Methodist preacher to heart. He says: "We stand in the relation of fathers to the generations yet to come, and it is our indispensable duty to pray that the system which has proved in the hands of the Spirit of God saving to ourselves may not be deteriorated by our means. ... We found it distinguished by an evangelical creed, a heart-searching and awakening ministry, and we must pray that the spirit-stirring energy of our pulpit ministrations may be preserved and increased. ... We found it spiritual in its economy and leading design, and on no account must we prostitute it to the purposes of party politics. We found its genius aggressive and inspiring, so far as the destruction of the kingdom of darkness is concerned; and if we would benefit mankind, we must foster this thirst for conquest. ... We found it, in an especial sense, benignant to the poor, and divinely fitted to benefit the outcast portion of our population; and if we would escape the curse of those who rob the poor, we must not mar its happy adaptation to enrich and save the thousands who still have occasion to cry, 'No man careth for my soul.' ... Though I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, yet I venture to predict that if we thus go on, enlarging and maturing the work at home, - if we fearlessly preach the doctrines of the Cross, and humbly depend upon the energy of the Holy Spirit; if we continue to send out converted missionaries to the heathen; if we persevere in fostering feelings of loyalty to our sovereign, of charity to our brethren of other denominations, and of love to each other; and if all this be done in the spirit of prayer, and with a single eye to the Divine glory, we shall then succeed in consummating the lofty and benevolent enterprise which our fathers commenced; we shall prove that Methodism is but in its infancy, not only in respect of age, but of efficiency; we shall accelerate the final victory, which is to place the sceptres of the earth in the hand and the crowns of the earth on the head of Immanuel."

